SALLIE'S BOY.

BY JESSIE M. E. SAXBY,

Author of "Dora Coyne," "Lindeman Brothers," etc.

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CHAPTER IX.

"SO RUNS MY DREAM: BUT WHAT AM I?"

"SIS is not so glad now the Squire has come as I thought she would be," mused Benjie, making observations a few weeks after Hubert's return. "And yet I am sure she loves him dearly, and he is very good to her. I suppose it must be about money, for he often says he is 'hard up,' and I know what that means. But Mam-lee doesn't love money. She is quite as happy without it as with it; so the reason for her sad looks must be something more than just hard-upness. I wish I could help her in some way."

The boy contrived to be a good deal with Sallie during these weeks, hovering about and ready to anticipate her wishes in everything, often looking at her with a wistful fondness that caused his sister many a pang, and at last led her to make him her confidante in part.

They were walking by the river one day. She had accompanied Hubert to the village, where he had an appointment with his man of business, and after parting with her husband she encountered Ben. She was not anxious to return at

once to the Manor; indeed, she meant to loiter about till the Squire came back, for she guessed that the interview with Mr. Heddle was not going to be a very agreeable one, and she hoped that her presence and sympathy might be of service when Hubert returned. So, with Ben's hand linked through her arm, Sallie strolled by the Silver, and tried to hear the voice of hope in its pretty tinkling; while the boy talked of old times, hoping in that way to raise her spirits, which, it must be confessed, were at an unusually low ebb.

She spoke little for some time; then quite suddenly she said, "Benjie, you've *always* seemed old enough to understand what I need most, you've always been a help to me; you are not like other boys, and I know you can keep my secrets and give me comfort. So, dear, I feel I must tell you a bit of—trouble that is making me sad. You have seen that I was sad. I know you have seen it by the way you often look at me. Ben, I am *very* sad." She stopped, and he did not speak; but he took his hand from her arm and twined it round her waist, and then she smiled through her tears and said, "Tall enough for that now! soon you will be big enough to lift Sis up and carry her—Ben, do you remember?"

"I think of *that* every day."

"Well, dear, I want to tell you that I am going away from Wately again, and very soon. That does not sound like a heavy trouble, does it? But that is not all. I fear it may be a—a long, long time, Ben, before I come back to Wately. There has been a great deal of—bother about money, and Hubert finds he has very little means at his disposal, and cannot afford to live at the Manor." She paused. It was so difficult to tell anything like the truth without blaming Hubert; and Ben made it more difficult by saying, "Everybody says the Squire of Wately is a rich man. All this land, the meadows, and the mill, and village, everything belongs to the Squire. How is it that he cannot stay at the Manor?"

"*That* is just the bit that I can't explain to you, Ben. I can only assure you that it is so. We must go away, and—Ben, it will be hard for you to—to see strangers in—the Manor, and to know that I shall not be able to—to come there for—some years."

"Strangers! I don't understand. Will the Manor not be closed as it was when you were away before, waiting for you to come at any moment?"

"The Manor is to be let while we are away."

"To be let! for how long?"

"I cannot tell; a few years perhaps."

"But, Mam-lee, it is your *home!* Years! But you won't be years away from us? You will come to Oaklea, if the Manor is let?"

"I cannot tell, dear. I only know we are going away for years, Ben. And I want you to know this; and to know that I felt I could not go without talking of it to *you*. You may be quite 'growed' before I come back, and there are some things I want to say to my pet while he is a boy."

Ben's heart was breaking. Not to see her for years! Never to talk to her till he had grown up! He must have given way to grief in a burst of tears, if he had not looked into Sallie's face, and the pain written there compelled him to keep control of himself.

They walked a little way in silence; then the boy said, "Tell me all you want to say. I shall never forget one word."

"It might all be put into a short sentence—be a good boy! But I'd like to say more than that, just for the sake of chatting to you, Ben, as we used to do."

"Put it as *long* as you can, Sis."

"Well, in the first place I want you to remember always what I used to tell you long ago; keep your ears open to the voice of conscience, and always do as conscience bids. Oh, believe me, Ben, you may be happy for a while in doing what you desire rather than what God commands, but it will be a kind of happiness that has alloy in it, and is not lasting. Sometimes it is not quite clear before one what is the right thing to do; but whenever you feel the least bit doubtful, then *wait*. Stand still and wait, asking God meanwhile to make the way plain, and to remove temptation, or fear, from your path."

"Are you thinking," Ben asked rather quickly, "that I shall want so much to go to Roy that I shall be apt to overlook some duty which should keep me at home?"

"I was *not* thinking of that. I was rather thinking of something *I* did. I should have waited, and trusted God to make all straight, but—I di ln't, and I daresay some of my troubles now are heavier for knowing that I have not always listened to the voice of conscience. I wished my example to be a warning to you. But about that cherished scheme of yours; just now it seems to me a very good plan for you to go to Roy, but—as you say—some home duty may present itself as a difficulty. If so, Ben, give it due weight, I entreat. Oh, my dear, let God guide you in all things. I shall so often think of you when I am away, and pray for you."

"Mam-lee, it *can't* be that I shall not see you for years. You may visit Oaklea, or I might go to you."

"That will be as God pleases. *My* place is by Hubert, and where he is I shall be. I do not think—indeed, dear Ben, I *know* that Hubert will not return to Wately for some years; and I think it best that you and I meet the truth face to face just now when we can talk of it together, and so help each other to bear it."

The arm round Sallie's waist tightened its hold, but Ben said never a word, and she resumed.

"By the way, I'd better tell you that our plans are not to be public property till we have left. There would be so much talking, which Hubert hates; and good-byes, which I could scarcely endure. Hubert gave me leave to tell *you*, Ben; but no one else is to know just yet. By-and-by all the world will know."

There was some bitterness in her tone as she said those last words. In truth, the sensitive, proud woman's soul was writhing under the shame of what would be said among the folks who knew the Squire and his wife, and she could not prevent some of her feelings from exhibiting themselves.

Ben glanced at her anxiously, and asked, "Sis, there isn't any sin in being poor? There won't be any wickedness in—in the Squire having to go away?"

Sallie's hands were quickly clasped upon her breast, and her head drooped low. She stopped in her walk, and stood in that attitude motionless, with her eyes upon the river murmuring happily the story of its wanderings among the fern and boulders, willows and grass; and Ben stood beside her, his heart throbbing wildly, but restraining himself in most manful fashion.

Presently the Squire's wife spoke in a low and broken voice. "There is no sin in our difficulties as the world judges 'sin.' Many, many men lose their fortunes as Hubert has done, and the world calls them foolish, not sinful. But, Ben, God's code of right and wrong is not the code of the world, and I dare not let you think that all has been as God would wish. *That* is what makes it so hard. I could bravely, proudly meet poverty with Hubert if I felt sure his misfortunes had not been the result of wrong-doing."

Ben, as we know, was reflective far beyond his years. He had a keen observation, a clear judgment, and he grasped the "situation" readily.

"People can't call the Squire ugly names, and the law can't come down upon him," he concluded in his own mind, and then he asked, "If you were to get a lot of money now, could things be made straight as they were before, and you come back to the Manor?"

"Oh, yes. And that is what Hubert hopes for; but, Benjie, I must honestly declare that I shall hourly pray that no such thing may happen, because the money that would come to clear us could only come by the way whence our own has gone."

"Don't you believe God might send it by some *other* way? There are such heaps of ways known to Him."

Benjie stood up beside her to the full of his slim boy's height, and he said, "Mam-lee, trust God to put it all right, and listen. *I* am going to work with all my might, and you shall have as much money as you need to bring you back to Wately Manor. It will be money approved of God, every penny, sis! and it will be my way of carrying you across the deep waters—stepping-stones of gold, Mam-lee! Cheer up, now," for Sallie's emotion had overcome her by that time, and she was sobbing unrestrainedly. "You must keep what I say in mind, and let it comfort you through the —years; for certainly God will help me, and I shall help you."

Then he drew her tenderly to a seat on the smooth bank of the river, and he talked of all his bright boyish plans for the future—in all of which she stood prominently forward as the central figure—until Sallie's composure had returned, and she could smile and respond to his glowing pictures of a time when he should come home from South Africa "growed" and grand, as befits a wealthy man, and how he should "first thing" go to her and pour the golden harvest of his life into her hands, and she should find herself Lady of the Manor as at the first, and everybody should be made happy.

"Boys have ideas," their father had remarked. Ah, would that men cherished more than they do the "ideas" of their boyhood! for I am sure if that were so the work of the world would be wrought on higher ground than it is; there would be less of what is sordid and selfish in men's lives; there would be nobler aims and grander results in the history of mankind.

God preserve in our race more and more of the "ideas" of the boy!

I do not know how long these two might have lingered by the Silver that day, if Sallie, following with her gaze the course of a dock-leaf which had become detached and borne away by the current, had not seen her husband coming towards the stepping-stones, near which the floating leaf had approached.

"There is Hubert!" she exclaimed, starting up; "and we have come so far along the river he will be across before he catches sight of us."

That was so; for though they walked quickly, and the Squire was moving moodily and slowly, never looking to one side or the other, he was at the ford some time before them, and had crossed ere Ben's shout attracted his attention.

He would have returned to assist his wife, but Ben called out, "Never mind; please don't come; *I* can bring sis safely over."

And very careful, manly, and tender he was as he guided her from step to step. He did not look at her, but she felt there was a hidden meaning in what he did, and she made an innocent pretence of fearing the river was rather more swollen than usual, and the stepping-stones just a little slippery, and her shoes not quite so well fitted as they ought to be for such work. Then, when it was over and she relinquished Ben's hand for Hubert's arm, Sallie said, "There never was so dependable a little man. I felt quite safe in your charge, Benjie."

But oh, the aching at her heart, while she gladdened her young brother's soul with her words and smile! oh, the anguish of knowing that another than Hubert Holmes was "helping" her!

CHAPTER X.

"WHEN EACH BY TURN WAS GUIDE TO EACH."

"WATELY MANOR to let! Well, I never!" Thus spoke Aunt Julia, after the Squire and his wife had gone somewhat abruptly, as aforetime, and the "news" was out and in everybody's mouth.

"The Manor to let! That never happened in the memory of man before. That never has been since the Manor was built. Well, what is the world coming to? And none of us to know a thing about it, either! I must say I think Sallie might have given us a hint of how matters were going. Well! well! and we in such a hurry to get her married to the Squire, and never to dream that *this* was to be the upshot! It's most disappointing, that it is!"

"Speak for yourself, Aunt Julia," exclaimed Annie, one of the few left to discuss matters. "*You* may have been in a hurry to get Sal out of Oaklea and into the Manor, but nobody else in this house particularly desired her marriage, I know. And now I wonder what the poor thing is going to do, for I just believe she has got precious little to live upon."

"I hear it said," spoke the Dragon, in a more subdued manner than was her wont, "that the money-lenders have got Hubert in their clutches. Ravens, beasts of prey, they are! It seems he has been gambling on the Continent—no worse, I should say, than those stockbrokers and merchants do on 'Change every day, and they go through the Bankruptcy Court and are no worse, but begin again. But for debts of honour—debts of humbug!—a man is expected to give over everything, or be called a knave. And it seems they've seized on the Wately estates. They can't alienate them, thank goodness! They can only sequester the income till they've paid themselves; and in the meantime how is Sallie going to get along? that's what I want to know. By the way, we'd better not talk of this in your father's presence; he can't make it any better, and it will only worry him for no purpose, poor man!"

So Aunt Julia maundered on, feeling insulted that she had heard the news first from public gossip, yet grieved enough at the calamity, and wishful to spare others further pain if possible.

She had not been without qualms of conscience since Sallie's marriage, especially at such times as Roy's departure, Clara's insubordination, and Fairly's discontent. When her own incapacity for fitly filling the place of Oaklea's queen was made most apparent, Aunt Julia would not have admitted that she felt this to any mortal, but all the same she was aware of it in her own soul, and was not without vague regrets that she had acted in such a hurry, and with such a conviction that her opinions were right.

"Wately Manor to let!" Fairly exclaimed, as he stirred his coffee one morning about that time, while Clara read aloud for his edification the home-letters, in by the early mail.

The brother and sister had ensconced themselves in very cosy, if modest, apartments, and were as merry as a pair of birds constructing a nest. Fairly had got a capital situation in an architect's office, and was already proving his talent by designs of great beauty and originality.

Clara was supremely happy in a generous order from a firm of art-publishers for a number of fine-art sketches. She expected to make a fortune in painting Christmas and Easter cards, and busied herself in creating (on paper) the most wonderful angels and fairies, stars and crosses that any imagination ever conceived.

They had always been more to each other than brothers and sisters often are, and now that they were alone together in London they seemed to cling even closer, and find yet more pleasure in one another's society. They were engrossed in their work, in the new life, in the stirring scenes surrounding them, in their aims, and hopes, and simple pleasures. So much did their own little world engage their thoughts, that they had nothing more than transient interest—evoked by occasional letters received—to bestow upon their old home. While nothing important transpired there, they took for granted "it was all right," and didn't bother to make special inquiries. In a casual way, Fairly had once or twice remarked he feared there was "a screw loose with Holmes," but what might happen if the particular screw became something more than loose, did not present itself to his mind. He was therefore as much astonished and concerned as the Dragon had been, when the news reached him.

"The Manor to let, and Sallie gone abroad with Hubert, not likely to return for years!"

"Poor, dear Sal!" Clara exclaimed, laying down the letter and returning her brother's gaze of consternation.

"I wonder if a fellow could have been of any use?" said he.

A man's first thought in face of trouble is how to *act;* the feminine mind gives the foremost impulse to regret.

"Perhaps," replied Clara sorrowfully, "we could both have been of use to sis, only we were thinking all about ourselves. And now I think of it, you remember we felt there was something far wrong. She often seemed so sad. How I wish we had been able to help her! for she was always very, very good and helpful to us."

"I don't see what we could have done. I might have kicked Holmes if that was what he needed, but I don't suppose Sallie would have thanked me. Oh, well! it's no good moaning over the matter, for we can't make it better in that way. We must just hurry up with our getting on, so that if sis needs money or the like, we may be ready for her by-and-by. I'll write at once and ask her about it all."

Which he did, delicately and brother-like, and received a loving reply. After thanking him warmly, and telling as much as she could without letting her really painful position be known, she said, "I do not *need* money at present. You know I like a quiet life, and I am not able for much excitement, so my wants are few and inexpensive; but should it happen at any time that I find myself in a fix, as you say, I shall remember what you and Clara have written, and shall let you know."

That satisfied Fairly and Clara, who went on their cheery way untrammelled by any care.

When the great news reached Roy he did not set it on one side so readily—perhaps because one of the letters which brought it was from Ben, and the boy's simple story of "Mam-lee's" departure, of her home inhabited by a swarm of "loud" and purse-proud Cockneys, of his own loneliness, of the desolation in the once large and happy home-band, made Roy aware, as nothing else could have done, what serious calamity had come to Sallie, and come through Hubert Holmes, whom Roy had been wont to look up to as the pattern of an English gentleman.

Ben's letter finished up thus: "I am doing as many lessons as I can. I am working very hard, and I am growing up fast, Roy. You know I shall soon be quite an old boy, and my school-time done. Then you will send for me as you promised. I so long for that time to come. I long for it *now* for a much better reason than just because I wanted to be a man and be with you. I want to earn money and help sis to come home again. It does so hurt to think of her in those horrid French and German towns, with scarcely any money. I *must* be rich in a short time, for Sallie's sake. You will help me; you *will* send for me as soon as ever you think I am fit to earn money?"

Roy lost no time in communicating with Sallie, and he could do so in a much more effective way than Fairly could. He was prospering, and on the road to wealth; moreover, he was her elder brother, and could take a liberty which none of the "children" might; so Roy did not scruple to enclose a cheque in his letter, and to tell Sallie that he meant to do so whenever the mood was on him, and that she must not mind taking money from him, seeing that it went to her enveloped in the tenderest love of her "chum and frater."

Anxiously he waited her reply, which came in due course, and set his mind comparatively at rest, though his heart was sore for her.

"I shall not be betraying any secrets," Sallie wrote, "in telling you just how I am situated at present, for many people know it, and why not you, Roy?" You have heard that we are drawing no income from Wately. Hubert hoped when we were at home that he could make an arrangement by which a small part of his income might be his; but those dreadful men with whom he had become involved, found out that Hubert's cousin (who comes after him, you know) would, in the event of Hubert's death, pay *all* his debts so as to free the estate; so they are dealing hardly by us. It seems terrible that men should be so unfeeling. I am turning my share of the family talent for painting to some use, and have a few pupils in drawing, as well as in water-colours. These pupils are English residents in this city; but besides these, I teach our language to some French ladies. Thus you see I am kept well occupied, and I am earning a living. Yet I will acknowledge that your timely gift was welcome, and I thank you with a full heart. Hubert is well, though he looks pale and anxious; but I have not lost patience and hope, for these rest on faith."

That was all she said of her husband, and Roy knew that her silence on the subject meant much.

The couple had settled down by that time into what we should consider a curiously sad and exceptional kind of life, yet one that is really too common. For a time they lived upon the little money Holmes had managed to wheedle his agent into giving, and when it was done they sold some jewels and "curios" they had saved from the wreck of their past. While living so, Hubert haunted the gambling saloons, and played for small stakes, and sometimes won, and sometimes lost; but he was becoming more expert, and less liable to being swindled by "professionals," and it happened that he began to win more often than lose.

He thought that Fortune's wheel was taking the right turn at last, and he could only curse the hard fate which prevented him from playing for high stakes as aforetime. Once he came to Sallie, and told her with some exultation

that he had made quite a little pile that night. "So you must have a new dress or something, sweet," he added; and then she spoke as she had never done before.

"We are living at present, Hubert, on the last of my trinkets. When that is done God will show me a way to earn bread for myself and you—since you cannot work, not having been bred to work, dear—for I shall never, never use one penny that is won by gambling."

She was very firm on the point, so he could only sulk and be silent about his winnings. He never brought these to her, and never said how the luck went after that evening, though Sallie could always tell by his demeanour whether he had lost or won.

He knew when she began to go out teaching, and sometimes he was moved enough to shed tears when she brought some little trifle he liked, bought with the money she had earned; but his sorrow for the straits he had brought her to did not end as all regret should, in repentance and amendment.

(To be continued.)

DUST-YARD WOMEN.

BY E. E. DICKINSON.

A FEW years ago some one was asked to define women's work. "Whatever is menial and badly paid," was the answer—than which, on the whole, nothing has been truer. It may have been so because it was repugnant to the mind of man that the fairer half of humanity should do anything but be bewitching, and he arranged that it should be allowed to labour only at the most discouraging tasks; or it may have been nature's little plan (we know she hath a well-balanced soul), because so many women have been worked for, and adored, and kept in idleness all their days, and somehow this had to be equalised. There must be a reason for things. There must be one for dust-yard women! Let us think for an instant of the lady of chivalry; let us think of the quantity that is written about the claim of maternity, and how by all means it should by all men be shielded and revered; of the fine words of Katherine the Shrew, to the effect that her sex sat warm at home while their husbands bore storm, and cold, and pain; and from all this to "hill-women" there is a mighty leap! If some women form the crown of life, certainly others have a good deal to do with its poorest dregs, for all that we cast away as quite worthless or offensive finds its way into their hands.

But those of the latter class, of whom this article is to say something, are not so much to be pitied as might be thought without reflection. Their work is hard and continuous. For quite twelve hours a day they stand, or sit, or dive among the refuse of all sorts and conditions of households. The dustmen collect from the bins of decent neighbourhoods, from the roads and gutters and back settlements of poor places, where refuse is thrown down promiscuously, and their collection of everything that is noxious and scrappy, and old and decaying, is

brought to the large dust-yards to be found in various parts of London. Here it is sifted and examined by women—a stalwart and motley company. Their faces are healthy, their muscles are mighty, their clothes of the queerest. They wear thick masculine boots, and huge aprons of sacking or leather, doubled or padded across the chest, which for the most part cover them, and their other garments are generally of the most various—ragged skirts, tattered tartan shawls, old coats and waistcoats, which are surmounted by weather-beaten complexions, tousled heads, and usually tawdry, dirty bonnets. Any sort of raiment, however, is excusable in their case, providing only that it be easy-fitting and warm, for they work much in wind and damp, and all through the year.

They sort and arrange into different heaps the extraordinary mass that is brought in by the carts. They sift it in large sieves, so that all the "breeze" (cinders and coal ash) falls together; making separate heaps of the broken glass, old iron and tin, coal, pieces of bread, bones, rag, paper, and vegetable which are found in every load. From habit they are as quick in their sorting as the boy who serves them is in throwing up continual loads for their sieves—great clumsy things, heavy to lift and awkward to move, which they hold against their chests and manage with ease.

It cannot be considered an ideal life for man or woman—digging and delving among offal of all kinds, in an atmosphere of stench quite sickening to the unaccustomed; handling rotten eggs and garbage, pouncing upon anything edible with the precision of a fowl upon a chance grain! Still, they are in the open air, they are not so badly paid as many kinds of labourers, they have freedom of speech, and abundant muscular movement, and their work is full of interest, of a kind! There are fairly fresh cabbage leaves and pieces of bread and cheese to be found; small lumps of coal, and corks, which they are allowed to take as perquisites, occasional halfpence, buttons, and other things easily pocketed and useful. And then their work is of a decided and highly varied utility. They are ministering to a score of trades and manufactures, for hardly anything comes their way with which something cannot be done. Bottles, if whole, are washed and sent out to be refilled, according as their shape and size warrant; broken glass is sold to be re-melted and made up. Rags are taken wholesale by some one, and revised according to colour and material, and finally re-appear in the public service as paper, whether for writing or wrapping. Old boots and shoes, if very disreputable, are of great value in the manufacture of glue; if not irreclaimably bad—it is surprising how very bad that is!—are patched up for future wear. Old bones are exceedingly valuable; they are made into handles for knives, forks, and fans, into buttons, and countless ornaments; they are used in the preparation of phosphorus, salts, blacking, and in sugar refining. Decayed vegetable and animal matter is taken by farmers as manure, "sifted soil," the residue of dust and dirt found in every cartload, is considered of some worth, and is employed especially in reclaiming marsh-lands for cultivation. Old iron is sometimes re-melted, sometimes becomes ship's ballast; old copper is highly prized, when found and much is done with pewter and tinware. But even in a dust-yard something is irredeemable, and is burnt, and a good deal of mud and abomination is ultimately thrown away into the Thames, near which most of the dust-yards are to be found. On the nature and odour of this it were perhaps well not to dwell, even in imagination; but the "hill-women" have to personally inspect it. Here in the river we may imagine it to be converted into something cleaner and of use to some one, for matter, we know, cannot be annihilated.

Can it be on the homœopathic principle of similar things being mutually curative, that the health of these women is so good? Of course the open air is practically a disinfectant for any not quite deadly germs, but one would have expected them to find their occupation quite as unwholesome as most factory hands. However, they and their husbands, who in many cases go round with the carts, are a robust set of people, only to be equalled by the sewer-men, who are the amazement even of the cautious and self-respecting faculty of medicine!

We could wish that the moral tone of the women of the dust-yards were somewhat better: they earn about twelve shillings a week, and get besides, coal and wood as perquisites; their husbands' weekly wages average three or four shillings a week more, which total, considering the style in which they live, is a fair sum. But a good deal of this is spent in drink, and black eyes are a frequent result of it. However, there are worse things in the world than black eyes! and on Sundays they wash themselves "radiant," and their heterogeneous working clothes are exchanged for much elegance and fashion; and one can get accustomed to bad smells and damp, out in the open air! There is no comparison between the lot of these barbaric dames and that of the overworked seamstress or match-box maker; the former are free and affluent, and it is something to be free; but confinement and lack of sunlight, and the illness that ensues—these are the unbearable things. It may be an unchivalric age that allows of the existence of the hill-women, but we think they are all the happier for this want of chivalry.

"THE LEAST OF THESE."

She had little of earthly beauty,
  She had less of earthly lore;
She climbed by a path so narrow,
  Such wearisome burdens bore!
And she came, with heart a-tremble,
  To the warder at heaven's door.

She said, "There were hearts of heroes,"
  She said, "There were hands of might;
I had only my little children,
  That called to me, day and night;
I could only soothe their sorrows,
  Their childish hearts make light."

And she bowed her head in silence,
  She hid her face in shame;
When, out from a blaze of glory,
  A form majestic came;
And, sweeter than all heaven's music,
  Lo, some one called her name!

"Dear heart! that hath self forgotten,
  That never its own hath sought,
Who keepeth the weak from falling,
  To the King hath jewels brought.
Lo, what thou hast done for the children,
  For the Lord Himself was wrought!"

ELLEN E. CHASE.

GARDENING.

Small Fruit Growing.—Currants and Gooseberries.

In a recent article in the *Nineteenth Century* the Editor of the *Horticultural Times* draws attention to the occupation of fruit-growing as a lucrative employment specially suited to women. He considers that women excel men in this branch of industry because success depends so largely upon those *petits soins* which are more especially a woman's work, and he also suggests that women have in a larger degree than men that "divine quality of patience" which is necessary to the fruit-grower in a special measure.

There appears to be no good reason why fruit-growing and horticulture should not supply a new field for the energies of English women, who will themselves give daily careful attention to details, and personally superintend such gardening operations as are beyond their physical strength.

Goseberries and currants deserve much more care and cultivation than the ordinary gardener bestows upon them. How often they are left unpruned and untended, while other crops are fairly well looked after, being apparently expected to bring their fruit to perfection year after year without any special care or attention.

The pruning of currant bushes is not unlike that of the vine. All primary summer shoots should be shortened to three or four pairs of leaves, in June, side-shoots being cut back to two pairs of leaves at the same time; the object being to concentrate the full power of the sap on the swelling fruit.

It should be understood with regard to fruit-trees of all sorts that the crop of each season depends largely upon the care and culture which the plant has received during the previous autumn; and that although manure given in the spring may increase the growth of a fruit-tree, it cannot supply the necessary flower-buds, which are formed many months before. As a rule, therefore, it is desirable to supply all fruit-bearing plants with a mulching of half-rotted manure soon after their crop of fruit has been gathered.

The roots of fruit-trees usually lie near the surface of the ground, and must not be disturbed or injured; great care is therefore needed in removing weeds between fruit-bushes, not to destroy the surface roots. A fork, not a hoe, should be used for weeding purposes. It is very necessary to keep the soil free from all other plants, and the fruit-bushes will be benefited by a careful loosening of the surface, especially before mulching with manure.

Gooseberries should be pruned on an altogether different system from currant-bushes. As their fruit extends along the young, well-ripened wood of the previous season, it is desirable to leave as much of this as possible, and to cut away all old, exhausted wood, leaving the centre of the bush thin, so that the strength of the sap may reach the terminal sprays on which the fruit will appear. This cutting-out of old wood should be done in the late autumn, after the growth of the bush is complete; the summer pruning being confined to a slight topping back of any terminal shoots which may be too redundant in growth.

Bud-eating birds sometimes attack gooseberry trees in the spring, bullfinches especially being very destructive in this way. One of the best remedies for this is to syringe or water the bushes with soot, lime, and soft-soap, made into a thin solution with warm water, which renders the buds distasteful to birds.

Occasionally a plague of caterpillars appears on gooseberry bushes. Syringing with weak salt and water will be found useful in this case. The caterpillars will fall on the ground beneath the tree, and must then be destroyed, or they will climb again to the leaves.

In a specially hot and dry season it is advisable to cover the surface of the soil between fruit-bushes with a mulching (or layer) of short grass cut from a lawn, or failing that, with cocoanut-fibre, tan, or even with ashes. This will protect the surface roots from the scorching effects of the sun, and keep the soil moist, especially if the ground is well saturated with water before laying down the mulch.

February is the right time to make a fruit garden of gooseberries and currants. Some of the finest varieties of the gooseberry come from Lancashire; and among the best of these may be named "Crown Bob" and "Prince Albert" (red), "Green Walnut" and "Thumper" (green), and "Broom Girl" and "Marigold" (yellow), all of which are well worth cultivation. Young plants of these may be purchased at two or three shillings per dozen, and should be planted in deeply-trenched and well-manured soil at a distance of six feet from each other. Both for purposes of picking, and also to give sun and air to the plants, they must have plenty of room; but young bushes may be set rather thicker if some of them can be transplanted when they have made two years' growth. Slips of gooseberries and currants should also be put into the open ground (in a small, well-dug border without fresh manure) about the middle of February. These, if slipped off the parent tree with a "heel," will soon root, and quickly grow into bushes. They should be from eight to ten inches in height, and may be topped back a little when they have taken root, to form good bushes, which should stand upon a single stem, any suckers they may throw up being cut off below the surface of the soil directly they appear.

Fruit-growers will do well to study the best methods of bottling and preserving fruit, as well as packing for market. All fruit must be picked with care when ripe, during dry weather. In packing for market no pains should be spared to prevent the berries becoming injured, as fresh fruit is far more valuable and wholesome than that which has been packed in bulk, and so become crushed. Small, flat baskets, lined with leaves, and filled only so far as to protect the berries from pressure, should be fitted into a wooden case, each layer covered with paper or leaves, and made tight with small wedges of wood, so that the fruit shall not shift during transit; if the case be made to fit the baskets (which may be bought very cheaply), the safety of the fruit will not be difficult to ensure. All arrangements for sale, transit, etc., should be carefully made some weeks before the fruit ripens, and the crop must be picked, packed, and sent to market with expedition.

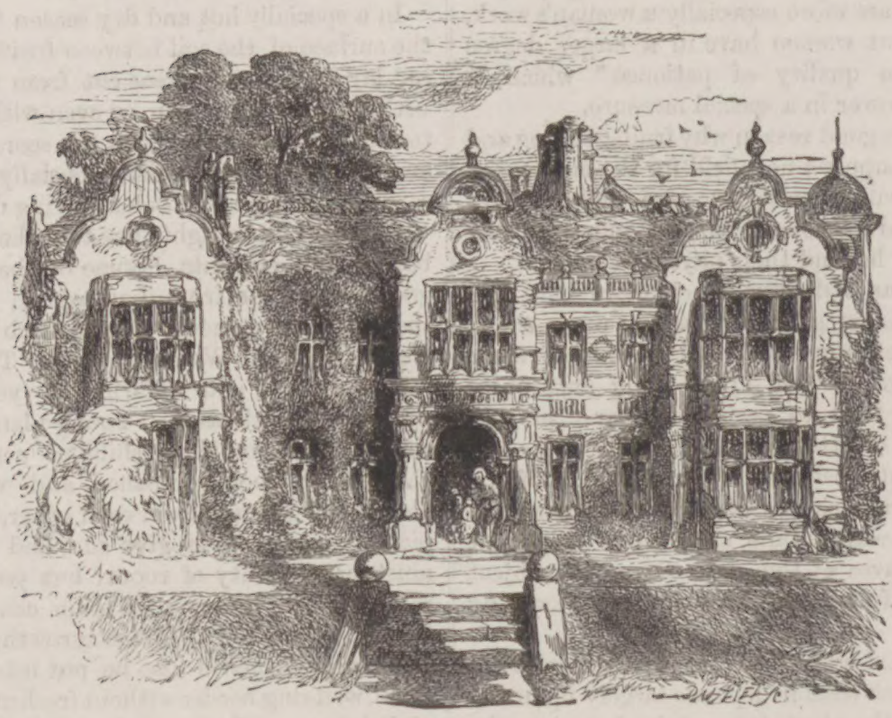
The fruit season may be lengthened by growing both currants and late gooseberries on a north wall, where they do well, and will retain their fruit till October, if necessary, when it is valuable for dessert. Nets are useful, in this case, to protect the fruit from birds, but are unnecessary in some gardens; if used, they should be previously laid in a tan-pit for a short time, as they will then last for many seasons.

I. L. Richmond.

THOSE CHILDREN; OR, SEMPER FIDELIS.

BY ANNIE G. G. GRAY-JONES (ANNIE GRAY),

Author of "One Winter's Night," "The Old Lock Farm," etc.



The old Hall.

CHAPTER I.

A BIRTHDAY LETTER.

It must be admitted that rich Miss Willoughby was not a popular person. Yet she was very liberal—as open-handed, people were wont to say, as had been the late squire, her father; and this was saying a great deal. But her generosity sadly lacked that ready sympathy, that personal contact with the recipients, which had lent such a charm to his. And so, though no case of real distress had ever been known to be represented to her in vain, and though her subscriptions to all the local charities fully sustained the character of the Willoughby family, this its sole remaining representative was regarded with but scant favour.

Yet, could those dissatisfied Carne people have peeped into the lady's heart, they would have discerned there anything but self-complacency. In fact, Miss Willoughby was continually bemoaning what she termed her useless and recluse-like life. But she had for so many years been accustomed to regard herself as some delicate exotic, requiring extraordinary care, that she honestly believed herself incapable of any kind of exertion. And as honestly likewise did she believe that the only way to preserve life at all in that fragile frame of hers, was carefully to shield it from the slightest approach to excitement or fatigue.

There was one thing, however, which Miss Willoughby could do, and do well. She could dream! Oh! those wonderful day-dreams of hers! Why, almost every night the old hall was peopled (in imagination) with the sick, the sad, and the suffering. And (in imagination) Miss Dora Willoughby spent hours tending such, ministering to them as she read of those noble and heroic souls doing, whose biographies she loved to study, and whom she often said she longed to imitate. But when anyone tried to rouse her into similar work, she would sigh, and speak languidly of her undoubtedly delicate constitution, and plead it as an insuperable hindrance. There was one elderly lady of her acquaintance, rather noted in Carne for her quaint straightforwardness, who once took it upon herself bluntly to accuse the little lady of downright wrong-doing. She told her that though she might indeed be incapable of great deeds, she had plenty of capacity for the little things of life—the little kindnesses, and charities, and benevolent actions which when summed up, she assured her, would soon produce a total of philanthropy almost equal to one of her most extensive day-dreams. But to this Miss Willoughby lent a very deaf ear. Her friend left her in righteous indignation that day, flinging at her a parting shot to the effect that lowly deeds were surely better than none at all, if they were good ones; and there were such things as edible brambleberries; and very good they were, if you couldn't get mulberries!

Well, for years after that, the mistress of the hall pursued the uninteresting tenor of her way, gliding deeper and deeper into the rank and file of the empty-handed, the men and women of the starless crowns, the dreamers and the shadow-hunters of earth, until the event occurred which I am about to chronicle.

It was her birthday, this wild and blustering Easter-Eve. Dinner was over, and she had drawn her chair close to the fireside, and had fallen into a comfortable doze. From this she was abruptly aroused first by the postman's sharp rat-tat, and next by the entrance of one of her old maid-servants carrying a letter. She took the letter indifferently. It gave her no concern. Its foreign appearance told it was from that orphan "Cousin Mary," who for some ten years

had lived at the hall, and shared with herself its love and its comforts.

But Mary had married, and gone to India. And somehow she had quite dropped out of her cousin's life. As for her letters, why, as Miss Dora often remarked, they were seldom anything else save chronicles of the sayings and doings, or the births, of some of her numerous children.

So she sat on, holding the thin letter listlessly in her hand, and all but falling asleep again, until a sudden recollection of a yet unfulfilled birthday duty flashed into her mind. Yes, she had forgotten her birthday text. For years she had on this particular day imposed upon herself the finding and the reading of some special verse or verses of Scripture; and she rose with a feeling of condemnation, and passing into her well-warmed and well-lighted drawing-room, hastily opened a large Bible which lay upon a small table near the fire. Next, in accordance with an old superstition of her girlhood, she let the pages fall open where they would.

"My favourite Gospel!" said she, with a very pleased expression, as the sacred volume opened at the Gospel of St. Luke. Glancing down that 16th chapter, her eye was arrested by some underlining, and some delicate writing on the margin close beside the 10th verse. Carefully adjusting her glasses, with the feeling that this must be her "birthday-verse," she read out aloud, softly and seriously—

"*He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.*"

"Beautiful!" gently murmured Miss Willoughby—a remark, however, undoubtedly made more from a sense of duty than from any appreciation of the meaning of the words. Then she looked at that delicate printing in the margin. Peering closer, she read—

"*Not alone by doing great things, but by doing little things in a great spirit.*"

"A sweet sentiment!" she remarked. "Cousin Mary's writing, I see. I wonder where she got it."

Reminded by this mention of her cousin that her letter was yet unopened, she now drew it towards her.

Oh, how she started! What agitation and dismay ruffled her usually placid face!

"To-morrow! to-morrow! impossible!"

The words were jerked out rather than spoken; both hands and voice trembled as she hastily turned to the first sheet, and re-read the letter aloud.

Thus it ran:—

"Marseilles.

"My dear Dora,

"I am in such a state of distraction that I scarcely know how to put pen to paper. As you see, we have reached Marseilles—Chloe, the seven children, and I. We were coming over to Donald's sister, his only relative; for the children have been at last ordered by the doctors to leave India altogether, if their lives are to be spared. Arrived here, a telegram has been handed me, stating that scarlet-fever has broken out in my sister-in-law's family. And oh, Dora, pity me, and pray for me! Another telegram has just come from India. My husband is seriously ill, and I must hasten at once to him. What can I do but turn in this dire strait to you? You will shelter my little ones, will you not? They will be no trouble, I do assure you. Black Chloe has nursed them all, and is like a mother to them; and they are dear, good children. I will come to them as soon as ever I may. Oh pray, pray that the dread fear which almost paralyses me, when I think of my beloved husband, may not be realised. It is a sadly inconvenient time on which to break in upon your quiet life, dear cousin, for it will be on Easter Sunday that my poor children reach the Hall. A young girl, engaged by my sister-in-law, is to meet them on landing, and is to act as under-nurse-maid. Hour by hour, dear Dora, my prayer will be ascending for God's keeping-hand upon my darlings and upon you. God bless and reward you.

"Your loving cousin,

"Mary."

What a Saturday night was that! Never in all her life had Miss Willoughby spent such a time. For, though for a full half-hour after reading the letter, and inveighing strongly against the carelessness or the accident—she knew not which—that had delayed it, she sat, head in hand, cogitating ways and means of averting the impending catastrophe, she rose at length, with the feeling that, come weal or come woe, Cousin Mary's helpless children must be sheltered and befriended, and that by herself.

Now Dolly, and Bridget, and Sarah, those staid old retainers of the Hall, were fully as inexperienced as their

mistress in the matter of children, and almost as afraid of them. Therefore Miss Willoughby herself, she who up to this evening had been waited upon, and petted, and nursed, like a helpless child, must take the lead, and assume the responsibilities as well as the dignities of her position. *She* must dive into the recesses of cupboards and ottomans. She herself must flit in and out of rooms long closed and unoccupied, watching the progress of hastily-lighted fires and the airing of long-stored linen. The unwonted activity of that eventful night was a source of mingled amazement and apprehension to all in the house; as was also the fact that, for the very first time in all her conscious existence, the lady of the Hall did not get to bed till close upon the day-dawn.

* * * * * *

"*You!*" shrieked Miss Dora, gazing in blank dismay at the rosy-cheeked girl who presented herself late that bitterly cold Easter Day, at the door of the Hall, with the startling announcement that she was nurse-in-chief to the tiny baby she held in her arms, and the six forlorn-looking little creatures clinging timidly to her skirts—"an inexperienced person, a mere girl, such as you!"

"Please, ma'am, it's happened most unfortunate," said the girl apologetically. "The black nurse took ill with cold, almost as soon as the lady left her at that French place, and when I met her yesterday at the boat, she was really ill. And last night the hotel people sent for a doctor, and he said it was rheumatic fever, and sent her right off to the hospital. She was in a dreadful way, ma'am. She did cry. But she'll maybe not be ill very long. And I'll do my best, ma'am—I will indeed. I'll do my very best."

CHAPTER II.

AN AWAKENING.

H! what a cloud—what a "wave of affliction," old Sarah termed it—swept into the Hall with those seven little strangers from India! Yes, it was useless denying it. Sweet and winsome as they undoubtedly were, they entailed a stupendous amount of anxiety and care and actual labour. Because each child seemed more delicate and weakly than the other, from overgrown, ten-years-old Muriel to the waxen-faced baby-boy of eleven months. And though the village doctor paid so many visits to the Hall that he laughingly declared he had better take up his quarters there altogether, Miss Dora, poor lady! resenting sorely this unwelcome interruption to her quiet life, and in secret rebelling against it, brooded over that individual responsibility of hers, until, as old Sarah put it, she began to "wear quite thin."

Every one of the children passed through what they themselves termed "sick times," before they had been many days in England; and very sick they were. And after this had passed, and they were enjoying their ordinary health, Miss Dora soon discovered, to her great consternation and amazement, that though the big room devoted to them as a play-room was large and pleasant, with a southern exposure, well stocked likewise with toys from the one toy-shop in Carne, these sanitary advantages and genuine privileges did not seem at all to compensate for the mother-love and the mother-interest they were missing so sorely. And she soon learned, too, how impossible it was to lie on her sofa as of yore, dreamily idling away the hours, when mingled howls and cries upstairs announced the unwelcome fact that even merry Bessie was failing to amuse her charges, and if peace were to be restored, some other means of enlivenment must be adopted these strangely dull and cold spring afternoons, and she must bestir herself to provide such.

Well, well, it could not long be delayed, that inevitable collision between selfishness and unselfishness, between pleasure and duty. Scarcely two months had elapsed before Miss Dora was kneeling in unutterable distress in the solitude of her own room, engaged in sore conflict. For the time had come when the decision of her life must be made. Private interests and self-pleasing, or the resolute acceptance of the interests of others, to the thrusting into a secondary place of her own—which was it to be? Would she persist in the old self-absorbed life? Or would she, in the strength of a Love and a Life hitherto all unknown, acquiesce in her changed surroundings, and embrace them, and yield herself to them as "the sweet will of God"?

It was then that there came floating into her troubled mind, as on the wings of the angels, her birthday text, understood so dimly at the time, all but forgotten since. How the words stood out now! With what a new light they seemed suddenly to have become invested!

"Thou didst desire a place in God's great field," they seemed to say. "Thou didst grieve because such seemed denied thee. Now it lies open unto thee! Arise and fill it! Be thou faithful in that which is least!"

And so there came to her that over which there is joy in the presence of the angels of God—true repentance, simple acceptance of One willing to forgive and able to save, fervent yielding to be His for ever! Old things had passed away! A new life had begun!

Semper fidelis! Yes, that was her life-motto now. And it all came through those children!—that blessed practical realisation of the sublimity of little things done in a great spirit! Why, *everything* took the form of "service" now! What did it signify that to everyone else the consoling and soothing of little Donald, when he fell and hurt his head, would appear to be nothing more than a most prosaic and ordinary duty! To her it was far, far more. It was nothing less than a "component part" of her old day-dream! The only difference between it and her beloved castles-in-the-air was, that she was ministering to one little unit instead of to the hundreds of her imagination. It was the same with all the childish troubles and the domestic difficulties which one by one were brought to her to be settled. Steps on that fair road of love and mercy, whose heights alone had been her ambition, she now discovered each one of them to be; and with a glad heart she recognised in the doing of them that "faithfulness in the least" which is the root of "faithfulness in much." It made her so happy! And undoubtedly it made many another happy too. For, on the principle that true love ever extends its circle of objects on which to expend itself, she soon began to look beyond the four walls of the old Hall and pour forth her sympathies outside of them.

This is how it happened. And it was all through those children again!

One evening, hardly knowing how to cheer poor Muriel after a long weary day of toothache, "Auntie Do," as they called her, opened out the past, and told her little niece something about the old day-dreams in which she had once so delighted. She spoke of them with such fervour and such pathos that the child, listening eagerly, was transfixed with pleased and wondering interest.

"But my poor health never allowed of my carrying out these projects," ended Miss Dora, with a little of her old self-pity. "I could only dream about them."

Muriel said little. The next day, however, as she dashed

into the dining-room on her return from a run into town with Bessie and two little brothers, Miss Dora saw that cheeks and eyes were bright with unwonted excitement.

"Auntie," she cried, "do you know we've come across the very kind of child you were telling me about last night, the one you wanted to help—a cripple girl, down here in the lane—and she is growing quite blind, and she is longing to have someone come and read to her and be kind and good to her. You'll go, auntie! And you'll let me go too, won't you? We can't have the Hall full of sick people, as you used to wish, you know! but we can go and see them in their own houses, can't we?"

The tending of blind Mary Ann was the beginning of much quiet but very blessed service. Stimulated by the encouragement which their first attempt at aiding others had received, little Muriel, and the others who were old enough to be interested, all developed a wonderful faculty for discovering plenty more who needed "not only the money you give every Christmas, you know, auntie, but *ourselves!*" Before she quite knew what was happening, Miss Willoughby found the old Hall converted into a very centre of help and blessing, with all kinds of comforts and good cheer emanating from it.

And what a reflex blessing came to herself, crowning her changed days with peace and gladness! All the burden of long, tiresome hours seemed to fly before the bright and busy doings of that wonderful summer. There were the Sunday afternoons, for instance—how weary and tiring they had been to children and aunt, and how strongly the latter had been tempted to transfer at least four of those depressed, melancholy little people to the nearest Sunday-school, just to be rid of them for a short hour or so! But now, Sunday had actually become the happiest day of the week! What with the carrying of a Sunday dinner or two to those who had none, or the sallying forth to sing round the poor recipient's chair some of their pretty children's hymns, or, on wet afternoons, the busy preparing of texts and scrolls to hang up on the bare cottage-walls, or the yet busier learning of new hymns and new texts to suit individual cases, Sunday became truly the pearl of all the week. Step by step the little Heywards became veritable "ministering children." And it would be hard to say which were the happiest—those bright-eyed, interested children, or the fragile little lady who threw herself heart and soul into all their new pursuits, and shared with them the delighted and grateful affection of those to whom they ministered.

Nine long months did the children live at the Hall—nine all-too-short months, their devoted aunt called them. At the end of four of those months Chloe rejoined her charges. And when Miss Willoughby felt the comfort of her motherly help and experience, she rejoiced. But she rejoiced still more that she had had to face the difficulties of the past alone. She was deeply conscious that those months of solitary teaching had brought her what she termed, and termed rightly, the blessing of her life.

Captain Heyward did not die. He recovered; but he had to leave India, and once more take up a permanent abode in England. Here was a grand opportunity for Miss Willoughby's newly-learned life of love! Seven children, a delicate wife, and a now sorely strained income—what else could she do but make the old Hall open house to the little ones, and share with Cousin Mary and her husband the cares and responsibilities of their up-bringing?

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"You weren't *always* our dear second mother, auntie? *Really?*" asked tall Muriel, years later; "and you did not always take this deep interest in the poor people? I do find it so hard to believe that all your life long you haven't been friend, and helper, and adviser, and mother in one, to the Carne people!"

"Child," was Miss Willoughby's answer, and it was given with much solemn gladness, "never can I thank God enough for His light upon this verse," and she opened the old Bible, and with a tender gleam in her eyes pointed to her birthday text that Easter-eve long ago. "To be faithful in the least, to do little things in a great spirit, that is what He has taught me; and a life of great joy and gladness has been the result. I fancied I could do nothing in those bygone days, just because I could not do the great things which alone seemed worth doing. I turned rebelliously from the small things within my reach, instead of being willing to see in my very inability for greater deeds the reason why I should look out eagerly for the little things. Until God, in His love, sent you children to me, and convicted me of selfishness and sin, and gave me true repentance, and set me down to the daily doing of 'ye nexte thynge.'"

"How it has all expanded!" said Muriel, as with a very bright smile she put into her aunt's hand a list of the men and women who were to form that Christmas gathering under the roof of the old Hall, which for some five years now had been such a pleasure—more than that, such a blessing—to their numerous poor acquaintances. "Dr. Hall has consented to give the little 'talk' which the people love so well. The very things you used to dream about have come to pass!"

"Yes; and very happy gatherings these annual meetings are. But, child, I have a deep conviction that, blessed and helpful as they are, the work which receives God's fullest smile is that quiet ministering to the sad and the lonely and the distressed in their own homes, into which you children have led me. Yes, yes, Muriel, I see it now. The 'sublime heights' of which I used to dream lie low in those hidden-away places where the little things of life are done in a great spirit. Let us be faithful in the least, dear one, and we shall be faithful also in much."

OUR WIVES.

RUSKIN, speaking of the wife, says:—"A judicious wife is always nipping off from her husband's moral nature little twigs that are growing in the wrong direction. She keeps him in shape by pruning. If you say anything silly, she will affectionately style you so. If you declare that you will do some absurd thing, she will find some way of preventing you from doing it. And by far the chief part of all the common-sense there is in the world belongs unquestionably to women. The wisest things which a man commonly does are those which his wife counsels him to do. A wife is a grand wielder of the moral pruning knife. If Johnson's wife had lived there would have been no hoarding up of orange peel, no touching all the posts in walking along the street, no eating and drinking with disgusting velocity. If Oliver Goldsmith had been married he never would have worn that memorable and ridiculous coat. Whenever you find a man whom you know little about, oddly dressed, talking absurdly, or exhibiting eccentricity of manner, you may be sure he is not a married man, for the corners are rounded off, the little shoots pared away, in married men. Wives have much more sense than their husbands. The wife's advice is like the ballast that keeps the ship steady."

KATINKA'S BETROTHAL.

BY MARY E. ROPES,

Author of "The Fortunes of the Frejhaldts," "Prince and Page," "My Golden Ship," etc.

CHAPTER IV.

HIS BROTHER'S KEEPER.

THE men went at a brisk pace across the ice, towards the north shore of the lake, where, on a steep slope, and surrounded by fir and pine trees, and huge blocks of granite, stood Sergey's home, a fine house half hidden by the dark stems of pine, among which it seemed to nestle; while partly behind it, screened from view by a copse of young larch and fir, was the small private chapel belonging to the Kartinskys. Here the family were accustomed to worship according to the rites of the Russo-Greek Church, every Saturday night and Sunday morning, and on Church holidays. Hither, too, they had gathered, to ornament their place of worship, and do honour to its shrines and sacred pictures, much that was valuable, rare and costly.

Rich gems sparkled in the raised gold work of the frames that held the paintings of the Madonna and holy child, and the various saints to whom prayers were addressed; while gold and silver crosses, and vessels set with jewels, sparkled on the shrines where they had been placed as offerings.

"I wonder where Nicolai is leading these fellows!" said Sergey to himself, as he prepared to follow. "What can he have in common with such men?"

Barely keeping them in sight, for fear of being seen, in his turn, Sergey at last saw them reach the shore, and begin to mount the steep bank, leading up through the grounds of the Kartinsky estate.

Hiding behind a rock here, and a pine tree there, Sergey now followed closer, and it was only when his brother paused and began to talk to his companions in a low, husky voice that he stopped also, by this time quite near, but hidden from view by a clump of young trees laden with snow.

"Now mind, my men," said Nicolai, "I am going to the house, and the servant will let me in, and will then go to bed himself. You had better wait about here among the trees till you see the light extinguished in that window there;" and he pointed to an upper casement which was one of the windows of his own room.

"Then," he continued, "follow that little path to your right, and wait behind the great boulder that stands near the chapel. I will come to you there, and call you when all is ready."

With these words he left them, and went round to the front of the house, and Sergey heard him give a loud ring at the door bell, and could even hear what he said to the man who let him in. The words were these: "Is Sergey Ivanitch at home, Stepan?"

Patiently Sergey waited, wondering what was coming next. The two men, Demetri and Kostia, also waited, a few yards away, watching eagerly for the promised signal.

One after another all the lights in the house were extinguished, the last being that in Nicolai's room.

At the end of about half an hour the side door opened, and Nicolai emerged. The men, in accordance with their instructions, had followed the little path to the right, as soon as the light in Nicolai's window had vanished. But Sergey had waited, hidden behind some bushes.

Turning suspiciously and timidly round, and looking furtively over his shoulder, the elder brother took the narrow path to the right, while the younger followed, not keeping to the actual path, but moving noiselessly along in the soft snow at the side.

Nicolai went on, toiling wearily up the ascent with laboured breathing, till he reached the chapel.

Here he stopped, took out a key and unlocked the door, pushed it wide open, and entered, followed softly by Sergey, who stole behind a pillar as soon as he was inside, and watched breathlessly to see what Nicolai was about to do.

Sergey was not long kept in doubt as to his brother's purpose. Nicolai began at once to collect from the shrines, niches, and altar everything of intrinsic value, bringing the treasures and depositing them in a heap on a cloth near the door, close to where Sergey was hidden.

The larger valuables collected, Nicolai approached one of the sacred pictures, and from his pocket took a small instrument, with which, after bending back the setting of a magnificent sapphire that sparkled in the frame, he carefully took out the stone itself, and was proceeding to extract in the same way a brilliant Siberian topaz, when Sergey, horror-struck at the enormity of his brother's crime (for sacrilege is considered one of the greatest of sins among the Russians), and feeling that now was the time to speak, stole softly up behind Nicolai and whispered his name.

Nicolai started, turned deadly pale, and uttered an exclamation.

"Hush!" muttered Sergey, under his breath; "wait till I have shut that door. Those fellows must not see or hear us."

Then, returning to where his brother was standing, the very picture of detected guilt and hopeless misery, a sudden impulse prompted him to do what perhaps was the wisest thing he could have done at the moment. Throwing his arms about Nicolai's shrinking form, he burst into tears, tears of loving pity, of tender sympathy, of regretful sorrow.

"My poor Collia," said he, as soon as he could speak. "What hath driven thee to this? Thou must indeed be in sore trouble, O, my brother!"

"I am ruined, Sergey, utterly ruined, unless by some means I can get money," moaned Nicolai. "Nothing short of this would have driven me to—to——"

"Alas, Collia! And can there be any ruin so great as the loss of all self-respect, and the reproach of one's own conscience, to say nothing of the risk of discovery and punishment? Believe me, brother, those low villains whom thou hast hired to assist thee (for I have seen them and

heard them speak, and can guess what they are) would betray thee without hesitation if they were in danger and might thus clear themselves."

"But what shall I do? What can I do?" groaned Nicolai, despairingly; and he glanced fearfully at the door, fearing the entrance of the impatient men.

"The first thing to do is to dismiss those wretches," said Sergey, firmly. "But thou art not in a fit condition to speak to them, Collia. I will go to them. They have mistaken me for thee already once to-night, and in the darkness they may well do so again, though if not, it does not matter. Do thou, brother, slip out at the side door, and get quickly home. I will come to thee in thine own room, and we will talk over everything together. But first let us put back the jewel in its setting, and restore these things to their places."

Sergey took the instrument from Nicolai's hand, and succeeded in putting back the sapphire in its soft and pliable setting; then took up the glittering vessels and crosses, and carried each article to its accustomed place in the chapel, while Nicolai, with one look at Sergey—a look which went straight to the young fellow's tender heart—softly unlocked the side entrance and passed out into the darkness of the wintry night.

Sergey secured the small door after his brother, then left the chapel by the main porch, and locked that too. This done, he sought the two men, and found them in a state of the greatest excitement and impatience at being kept waiting so long.

"I know not what you mean, Barrin," said Demetri, mistaking Sergey for Nicolai, as Kostia had done earlier on in the evening. "You told me you would only be a few minutes in making your preparations, and that then I was to come with my tools and take off the lock of the door, to make it appear as though the chapel had been broken into; and while I did this, Kostia here was to help you pack up the pretty things. But you have kept us over half-an-hour."

"Hush!" said Sergey, in a whisper. "I have been detained, for we are under suspicion, and in peril of discovery. Nothing whatever can be done to-night, and my advice to you is, go off as quietly as you can, or you may be caught."

Demetri uttered an imprecation in his wrath and disappointment, and Kostia said with a whine—

"And you send us away empty-handed, Barrin, when we have been at your service this whole evening, standing about in the cold?"

Sergey suppressed an exclamation of disgust, and took out two three-rouble notes, giving one to each.

The men snatched them eagerly; then saying, "You know where to find us, Barrin, when you want us!" they turned and slouched away into the shadows, down the narrow, winding walk towards the lake.

Thankful to get rid of them, Sergey followed Nicolai to the house, letting himself in with his latch-key. Going straight to his brother's room, he found him stretched upon the bed, moaning like one in mortal anguish, his face hidden in the pillow.

Sergey laid his hand on the shoulder nearest to him, and seating himself on the side of the bed, said gently—

"Dear Collia, be brave now, and face thy troubles manfully. Try to be frank with me, to keep nothing back. I love thee, my brother, as thou knowest, and I would fain be of service to thee, but I am helpless unless I know the whole case."

And Nicolai, whose heart was softened by Sergey's kindness, told him his story without reserve—a story which

astonished and horrified Sergey not a little, showing as it did how terribly easy it is to slip quickly down the hill of moral virtue and rectitude, when once the descent is commenced. And now, gambling debts, unpaid bills for all sorts of extravagances, imperious demands for money, and claims backed by threats of exposure, were among the burdens that Nicolai confessed he was bearing; and to get rid of which, he had at last been ready to commit a great crime.

As Nicolai concluded his painful story, his brother said—

"Thanks for thy frankness, Collia, and forgive me if I ask thee one more question. Tell me, dost thou love Katia Dolgaretsky?"

"Love her? Not I!" replied Nicolai, turning his face full upon his brother as he spoke. "But to say truth, Sergey, I love her dowry, for I have, as thou seest, great need of it, and since our parents and hers desired the union, I was willing to fall in with their wishes. But now that the betrothal and marriage are put off, the engagement is only a burden to me, for I am none the richer for it, while I am tied to a woman whom I do not love. And what is more, Sergey, she feels to me as I to her; any one can see that."

Sergey did not reply for a minute or two. At last he said—

"As I understand thee, then, my brother, thou wert hoping for the dowry—in case of a speedy marriage—to help to still thy creditors; and when the dowry was not forthcoming, thou hadst recourse to the plan which I prevented thee from carrying out to-night."

"Yes, Sergey, it was my last chance. I had been to Uncle Alexander, and entreated for help, but he refused, and vexed me moreover by saying that he wished our aunt's fortune had been left to thee, instead of to me; but that fortune or no fortune, he loved thee best, and would see to thy future. I was jealous and angry after this, Sergey, and tried to set thee against him. I am sorry now, dear brother; forgive me."

"Say not another word about it," rejoined Sergey; "thou hast done me no harm. Now listen, Collia. Supposing I were able to help thee pay the more pressing of thy debts, wouldest thou be willing to give up this past life of thine, and thine evil companions? And then——"

"Then," interrupted Nicolai, eagerly, "I would plainly say to my parents and Katinka's too, that I could not marry the girl. And to tell the truth, Sergey, there is a maiden, who, without a rouble in her hand, is dearer to me than Katerina Gregoriovna with all her dowry. Could I but win clear of my troubles and debts in St. Petersburg, I would marry and take my wife away to some place where the old temptations would not assail me, and where I could redeem my lost character. Poor Minna, she loves me; but we had given each other up in prospect of the betrothal with Katinka."

"Minna? Meanest thou the Finnish widow's daughter?"

"The same. They are poor indeed, but Minna is none the less a lady for that, and she is pure, and fair, and sweet as one of our woodland lilies."

"So? Then now, Nicolai, we understand each other. I will do my best to help thee, and thou in thy turn wilt promise me solemnly to forsake the evil courses which have laid upon thy heart of late such heavy burdens, and to return to the ways of honesty and peace. Forgive me, brother, for speaking thus to thee, but I have thy welfare and thy happiness at heart."

The brothers shook hands warmly, and Sergey went to his own room to think over his talk with Nicolai, and to try and find a way of assisting him without bringing upon him suspicion or blame. In pondering over this difficult matter, Sergey endeavoured to put away from his mind the thought of Katinka, and the possibility that she might yet be his.

CHAPTER V.

UNCLE TO THE RESCUE.

KATINKA was more troubled than she would have cared to confess, by what she had seen on the evening of her lonely skating expedition. The more she thought it over, the more disturbed she felt. She argued that Nicolai, destined as he was by his parents and hers, to be her husband, could hardly be so rash as to be making love to another girl, and, therefore, that Minna's companion on that occasion must have been Sergey.

Katinka was too proud to go to Widow Frommath's cottage, and find out from Minna herself what she would have given worlds to know. But she grieved in silence, feeling bitterly disappointed in Sergey, and yet being angry with herself for her sorrow.

To escape from Olga Vassiliovna's injudicious questioning and advice, the girl spent as much of her time as possible out of doors. Braced by the fresh pure air, and the rapid motion of her sledge or skates, she found her troubles easier to bear than when she was continually reminded of them at home.

One evening Widow Frommath came up to the house to say that her daughter was ill, and entreated to see Katerina Gregoriovna.

Olga Vassiliovna made some objections, but Katia begged so hard for permission to go, that her father interfered on her behalf, and the girl drove off in her sledge, taking the widow with her, while Neptune bounded along behind in the snow.

Katinka found Minna in bed, apparently suffering from some kind of nervous fever. The sick girl's pale face brightened as her visitor entered, and she murmured gratefully, "Thank you, O thank you for coming. I felt so ill, and feared that soon perhaps I should not be able to say what I want to. Dear Katerina Gregoriovna, I have a confession to make."

"A confession—and to *me*?" asked Katia, with surprise.

"Yes, and I would have made it before, but I knew not until a day or two ago that I owed it to you, and ought perhaps to ask your pardon."

Katinka sat down by the bed, and took the girl's fevered hand in her cool clasp.

"Dear Minna," she said soothingly, "I am at a loss to know how you should have anything to confess to me, or for what I could give you forgiveness. But I shall be glad to listen to whatever you may say, if it will be any sort of comfort to you."

"Thanks, dear Katerina Gregoriovna. I will then begin at the beginning, and tell you that a year ago a young gentleman came with his land steward to look at some of the cottages in the village, and to see what changes and repairs would have to be made in case his father bought the land, as he was thinking of doing. They came to our cottage among others, and the Barrin seemed surprised to find my mother and me there, because he said he could see we were no peasants. He spoke very kindly, and soon after he came again, came several times, making himself as much at home in our poor cottage as though it it had been a mansion like his own. At last one day he told me that he cared for me, and asked me to be his wife; and though at first I hesitated, knowing how poor we were, and in what a humble position,

I said at last that I would, for, indeed, I loved him with my whole heart. He told me that for the present no one must know of our mutual promise; so I kept it quiet, and so did mother, feeling that he must know best what was wisest to do. But a short time ago he came to me and said that our engagement must not continue. Circumstances over which he had no control, made it impossible that we should ever be married, and that therefore we must give each other up."

"Dear Minna, what can all this have to do with me?" asked Katinka. "Why should you distress yourself by telling me so much?"

"Because, dear lady, a rumour is going about among the villagers that a marriage is being arranged between you and a young Barrin Kartinsky (I know not which), and I felt that as you had seen me with one of them that evening when you returned from skating, you ought to know the truth."

"I do not yet quite undertand you, Minna," said Katinka, her heart beating fast with suspense. "Of which of the brothers do you speak? To which of them did you promise yourself? To Sergey Ivanitch?"

"Sergey Ivanitch? No, indeed! I should not know him by sight, save for his likeness to his brother. It is Nicolai whom I mean."

Katinka dared not trust herself to reply for a moment or two, but she drew a deep breath of relief, and stooping down pressed a kiss upon Minna's fair brow, feeling her heart lightened of a great burden.

"I thank you for your confidence, Minna," she said at last, rising to go. "Be assured you have said nothing whatever to trouble or vex me. Hush, dear, you must not talk any more, or you will increase the fever. Good night, I will come again to-morrow, if I may."

"Do, pray do!" murmured Minna, and Katinka left the cottage and drove home.

(To be continued).

SUPPERS AND BREAKFASTS.

Menu.

SUPPER. — Stewed rabbit, raisin cake.

Breakfast.—Fried bacon, dripping cake.

Stewed Rabbit.

Materials.—1 rabbit; ¼ lb. fat bacon; 2 onions; 2 carrots; 1 turnip; 2 tablespoonfuls flour; ½ teaspoonful salt; 1 pint water; a pinch of pepper.

Directions.—Cut the rabbit into neat joints, with a sharp, old knife, splitting the head in two parts. Mix the flour, pepper, and salt in a basin, and dip each piece of rabbit into the mixture. Cut the bacon into bits, and fry it brown; take the bacon out, and brown the rabbit in the bacon fat, also the onion, which must be cut in rings. Take out the rabbit and onion when browned, and place them in a large-necked brown jar, which will stand in a saucepan, or into the inner pan of a double stew-pan. Slice the carrot and turnip (which must first be cleaned) and add them to the rabbit and onion. Mix the rest of the flour, etc., evenly with a pint of water, pour it over the whole, and place the jar in a pan half-full of hot water on the fire. Boil for two hours, covering the jar with a saucer.

If the carrot and turnip should be old, it is necessary to boil them sharply for half-an-hour in the pint of water before adding them to the stew, or they may be tough. A jar is the best thing in which to cook a stew, as it keeps the contents (when the water in the saucepan boils) exactly at the right temperature—*i.e.*, a little below boiling point.

The water in the outer pan should be kept up by adding hot water from a kettle every half-hour; it should reach as high as possible up the sides of the jar, but must not spurt over into it. A small tin saucepan to fit into a larger one, allowing an inch or so between the two for the boiling water, and having a close cover, and wire handles to double down over it when needed, is a most valuable possession for a good cook. But those who have not a double stew-pan can do almost as well with a judiciously chosen brown jar. Time, 3 hours.

Plain Raisin Cake.

Materials.—Baker's dough, 2 lb.; raisins, stoned, 2 teacupfuls; brown sugar, 2 teacupfuls; spice, ½ teaspoonful.

Directions.—Get the dough from the baker's when ready to be made up; knead in the spice, sugar, and stoned raisins. Grease a cake-tin and bake the cake in a moderate oven, until a knife, when run into the middle, comes out bright and clean. It is then done. Time, 1½ hours.

(N.B.—A cake should be made the day before it is cut.)

Fried Bacon.

Materials.—Bacon, ¾ lb.; bread, six small slices.

Directions.—Slice the bacon (which should be streaky) thinly, cutting off the rind. Roll each slice up as you would thin bread and butter, run a fine skewer through the rolls, lay them in the frying-pan, when hot on the fire, and fry quickly a light brown. If you have room in the pan, fry the slices of bread at the same time; otherwise take out the bacon, and keep it hot while the bread is fried. Lay the rashers on the fried bread, and serve quickly.

A good housekeeper will prefer to cure her bacon at home, when it will be both more economical and of a better flavour than that which is bought ready cured. There are, however, many varieties of bacon in the market, some at a very low price; and those who have not facilities for home-curing should select good bacon, neither too fat nor too lean, and of a pink and white tint, not yellow.

Dripping Cake.

Materials.—1 lb. baker's dough; ½ lb. dripping.

Directions.—Roll out the dough while warm, spread it with dripping, fold it in three, roll it out, and spread it again (as you would in making puff pastry); repeat this until the dripping is all used, then fold it again till it is an inch and a half in thickness, score it over the top in diamonds with a floured knife, and bake in a quick oven. It can be warmed for breakfast, or eaten cold if preferred. Time, 1 hour.

This is an old-fashioned but delicious dish, either for breakfast or tea; it should be eaten with salt.

Expenses for both Meals.

Rabbit, 11d.; bacon, 7d; vegetables, 1½d; flour, salt, etc., 1d.; dough, 3½d.; raisins, 2d.; sugar, 1d.; dripping, 4d.; bread, 2½d.; milk, 2½d. Total, 3s.

Average, sixpence per head for six persons.

I. L. Richmond.

DRESS AND DRESSMAKING.

THERE probably never was a season when the cottons and muslins were so various and so pretty, and there is a great deal of warmth in some of the cottons, making them quite fit for the chilly days and cool evenings that will come even in the warmest weather. It is a great mistake not to have one's summer clothes ready in time, or else when the warm days come and we still have only serge or cashmere to wear, we are fagged and overheated, and too much wearied with our hasty preparations for change to do ourselves and our skill in dressmaking justice. Again, under these circumstances, those who get their living by making other people's gowns are rushed and worried, very much to the detriment of both health and comfort. People do not think about these things as they ought, but it is simply cruel not to look beforehand, and order winter or summer clothes in good time, so that the workers may not have to sit up at night and ruin their sight by trying to satisfy every one at once, and keep their customers together.

For this reason, among others, it is only right to draw attention to downright summer fabrics, though the east wind prevails so much in May that they have little chance of being worn. The Bradford Company, who send out their patterns by post, in such a form that they are perfect boons to those who make their own dresses at home, have issued a great many varieties of oatmeal cloths, which are so very useful for young people; and their zephyrs, striped and plain in pretty tints of pinks and blues, while very moderate in price are capable of being made up into stylish summer gowns quite as good as any middle-class woman need wish to wear. They have also been most fortunate in their combinations of black and white, and these are very welcome to persons in mourning, or that very large section of womankind who know that they look better in black relieved with a little white than in anything else. For really dressy yet inexpensive summer wear they have muslins with lace stripes woven in them, and many are covered with very graceful and harmoniously-tinted floral patterns. Nothing better can be desired for a summer wedding, garden party, or fête, than one of these.

Draperies are going to be rather full and fussy this summer, but decidedly long, and a very good way of making up a muslin is the following:—First of all comes the foundation skirt, which should be of a plain, thin sateen, white, écru, blue, or whatever may be the ground of the muslin. In it put one small steel from nine to twelve inches long according to taste, and coming eight inches below the waist. A very small pad, or a fan of stiff muslin, must be sewn into the band at the back; the presence of neither this nor the steel will be noticeable, but their absence would make the dress look dowdy. This foundation skirt should be entirely finished, band, hooks and eyes, and all, and hung on one of the cheap wicker stands which every one who aspires to make her own dresses ought to possess, for it is simply impossible to arrange modern ones without. Then take four widths of muslin the proper length for the skirt, allowing for whatever hems and tucks are wished, say a hem of two inches and three tucks of an inch each in depth. They are very pretty in plain muslins, but flowered ones are better without, because the tucks destroy the continuity of the pattern. But if the semblance of tucks should be very much desired, carefully-cut inch-wide bands of Swiss or mull muslin may be stitched on evenly underneath the muslin, as this does not interfere with the pattern. These four widths being run together, hemmed and tucked, should be sewn, in flat and rather small pleats, on to the lower edge of the band of the foundation skirt, and allowed to hang over it pretty full all the way round. The draperies are the next consideration, and there are three of them, one on either side nearly meeting in the middle, which are made in triangles, the selvedge side of the muslin being towards the front, as long as the skirt, while the top must measure forty inches, and the slope forty-three. Make four pleats turning towards the front, and five towards the back, leaving a plain space in the middle which must be closely gathered. The back drapery must be quite as long as the skirt, and must measure two yards eight inches across, the centre being rounded at the top part, the round occupying about nine inches of extra length, and so wide that there are twelve inches of muslin on either side of it. Pleat each twelve inch space into two inches, run the two sides of the curve together, gather closely and sew to the band above the pleats, turning it once to the left and once to the right while doing so. The bodice must be full and must have a lining, and the waistband ought to be a ribbon two-and-a-half yards long, lined with stiffening, just the size of the waist and furnished there with hooks-and-eyes, while the ends can be tied in a loose bow with loops about half the length of the ends.

The illustration shows a useful dress for between seasons or cool summer days, and is intended to be in two shades of grey or fawn alpaca, which is very much worn, and most useful for travelling, as dust shakes off it, and rain does not seem to settle. The sash can be either of ribbon or of the material. The pattern speaks for itself to many people just from the look of the thing.

Most of the new hats have rather wide brims in front, tapering towards the back; and very pretty black and brown felt hats bound with Petersham silk, are being worn by young girls, and when trimmed with a good-sized bow of corded ribbon, they do not cost more than five shillings.

The great thing for spring wear, at all events for ladies who have abjured hats, is a black lace bonnet with a bunch of double Parma violets in it made of shaded mauve velvet, and most realistic-looking leaves. If ordinary Russian or giant violets are preferred, they are of satin, but decidedly larger than they have previously been made.

The new bonnets are flat, and the great feature is a double bow of ribbon in front, and sometimes bows under the brim. They are not unlike the Princess bonnets of a few years ago, but the strings come from the back. Some are entirely made of ribbon on a wire shape.

Patterns of the draperies and bodice for muslin dress, and also of the alpaca, may be had by forwarding 1*s.* 6*d. in stamps for either one or the other to M.L., at the office of the Mothers' Companion. All patterns are medium size.*